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ON PAGE A1

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# The Soviet Wife Who Came In —and Out Again

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Last Sept. 25 was a terrible day for Georgi Mamedov, a poised, articulate 36-year-old Soviet diplomat described by American counterintelligence officials as an operative of the KGB in Washington. That was the day Georgi Mamedov's wife, Irina, took their 5-year-old daughter, Tatiana, and defected to the FBI.

FBI agents quickly whisked Mrs. Mamedova and her daughter to a heavily protected safe haven more than 25 miles from Washington, beyond the area in which Soviet officials are permitted to travel freely. Several days later, Soviet security agents put Mamedov onto a plane for the Soviet Union, where he is likely to remain for many years.

The FBI hoped it was about to score a coup in the intensifying battle between Soviet and American intelligence agencies—the first defection by the wife of a KGB agent stationed in Washington. But the leading lady in this drama rewrote her part.

Soon after her defection, Mrs. Mamedova—who spoke English well, and called herself "Irene" in dealings with Americans—talked to American friends by telephone. She had previously spoken openly with them about her marital difficulties. She told the friends that she defected first of all for her daughter.

She picked Sept. 25 to flee to the FBI, Mrs. Mamedova said, because she and her husband were scheduled to return to Moscow for an extended leave in the next day or two.

She also said she had no intention of ever meeting with officials from the Soviet embassy to explain her action. Such meetings are common, but the U.S. State Department allows a defector to decide whether or not to hold one.

The next 12 days were traumatic

ones for Mrs. Mamedova, a dark-haired 35-year-old whom American counterintelligence sources described as neither well educated nor particularly strong in character. She had fled to the Americans not for any political reason, but because she wanted to get away from a husband who regularly got drunk and beat her, according to American officials.

Somehow, Mrs. Mamedova's original certainty about her defection dissolved during the subsequent 12 days. She agreed to have a meeting with Soviet officials, and the meeting took place on Oct. 7. According to American officials, the Soviets at this meeting told Mrs. Mamedova that they knew about the difficulties in her marriage, appreciated the emotional strain she must have been under, and promised that if she returned to the Soviet Union, no reprisals would be taken against her or her family.

At the end of that meeting she decided to return to her homeland. She left the State Department in the custody of the two Soviet officials.

One senior American counterintelligence official described Mrs. Mamedova as "a classic case of the battered wife . . . We weren't exactly sure what we had," the official added. These American officials said Mrs. Mamedova could not cope with the trauma of being completely cut off from her past life and personal associations, and decided to go back to Moscow.

Friends who talked with her soon after her defection had no further contact before her decision to go back home, and could offer no explanation for her abrupt change of heart.

A former Soviet defector who fled to the West several years ago said in an interview that those first days after a defection are filled with emotional strain, and that a new defector—particularly a wife and mother with no strong political feelings and very few ties to American life—would have to be handled with great delicacy by American counterintelligence officials. This earlier defector speculated that the pressures just may have been too great, particularly if Mrs. Mamedova felt in any way misunderstood by her new protectors.

A senior U.S. official said Mrs. Mamedova and her daughter would have received American asylum if she had requested it, but more for humanitarian reasons than for the potential intelligence information they might have gained from her.

Other former Soviet citizens, including the earlier defector, said she has probably been harshly punished for committing an act the Soviet Union regards as high treason. American counterintelligence sources said they had information indicating that Mrs. Mamedova would probably lose custody of her daughter.

Georgi Mamedov's promising career may have been destroyed, American officials and former Soviet citizens said. As American counterintelligence sources put it, KGB men stationed in Washington are not permitted personal transgressions like drinking too much or mistreating a wife.

However, Mamedov enjoys special status in Moscow as the son of an important government official, so he may yet be able to salvage his career, some sources said.

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